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ABSTRACT

This publication provides information on the accreditation process for early childhood education and care providers participating in the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS), developed by the National Childcare Accreditation Council of Australia. The publication is divided into sections corresponding to steps in the self-study/accreditation process. Section 1, "Getting Started and Getting Involved," discusses organizing the accreditation committee, garnering support, documenting progress, involving parents, and dealing with staff concerns. Section 2, "Emotional Issues and Concerns," examines guilt, fear of failure, and interstaff conflict. Section 3, "Areas for Improvement and Plans of Action," discusses developing a plan of action based on identified areas for improvement from parent questionnaires and staff observations. Section 4, "Sending in the Self-Study Report," highlights the importance of an organized report for use by the reviewer. Section 5, "The Review," suggests how to plan for the review visit, deal with emotional issues, and debrief participants. Section 6, "When It's Over," emphasizes accreditation as an ongoing process. Section 7, "The Decision," discusses possible outcomes of the accreditation process. Section 8, "Problem Areas," examines common areas of concern for providers. Section 9, "Handy Hints," suggests using external resources, networking with other children's services, using parent skills and resources, and having a facilitator throughout the process. Section 10, "The Best Parts, or What Gets You Through," reminds readers that the accreditation process can develop staff feelings of shared purpose, enhance teamwork through the use of a common language, and bring recognition of successful service. (KDFB)



Accreditation & Beyond

Surviving Accreditation

A QIAS Ideas Bank

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Contents

Foreword	i
Introduction.....	1
Getting started and getting involved	2
Emotional issues and concerns	8
Areas for improvement and plans of action	11
Sending in the Self-Study Report	13
The Review	15
When it's over	18
The decision.....	20
Problem areas	22
Handy hints	25
The best parts, or what gets you through	27
Conclusion	29
Bibliography	29



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Surviving Accreditation

Jan Ferry

Foreword

Thinking about what is done and why, about whether it can be done better and how, is a process which is at the heart of improved practice in child care no less than in any other field.

The Accreditation and Beyond Series supports that process in practical ways.

Each of the books in the series puts ideas about good practice up against the understandings about children and their needs on which they are based. This is done deliberately. There are no recipes for good practice. There are, however, principles which can be used as a benchmark for deciding whether what is being done is good for children and the people who work with them. Many of these are drawn out in this series.

The impetus for the series was to provide practical support to services participating in the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System. However, it is also intended that the series be an ongoing reference for early childhood professionals and services working to provide quality care for children.

It is not meant to be a final statement on any of the areas it covers and the range and depth of the series is deliberately diverse as is the child care sector.

Surviving Accreditation deals with: getting started; organising the committee; setting the time frame and dealing with the workload; involving parents; overcoming anxieties; managing differences; and reaching agreement. The 'ideas banks' in the book give a wealth of practical hints and information gained from going through the process, which the author has done.

Other titles in the series are:

- Staff-Child interactions: A Vygotskian perspective;
- Babies need more than minding: Planning programs for babies and toddlers in group settings;
- The very best of care and education: Many ways to the Quality Improvement & Accreditation System;
- The policy handbook: Developing policies in child care;
- Highlighting health: A discussion of health practices and accreditation; and
- Thought for food: A starting point on children's nutritional meals.

AECA hopes that these books will assist in making the accreditation experience rich, constructive and successful, and that the series will be an ongoing resource to services.

Tonia Godhard
President

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For their contributions

The staff and families at Possum Place Child Care Centre.
Cherie Snellgrove, Tracey Ashton, Muriel and Ron Haywood.

Photographs: Kirsten Dreese, Joanna Jankaus, Rhonda Milner, and Andrew Sikorski.

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Introduction

Accreditation has become an important word in the child care vocabulary over the past several years. It has moved rapidly from a vague concept to a reality with which our profession is having to come to terms. Perhaps you are wondering how we measured the quality of our work before, or even got along without much formal measurement at all! It's exciting to know we can demonstrate clearly that we're providing a high quality service, but at the same time frightening to put our profession, and ourselves, on the line.

The child care profession is a little like a tree. Regulations are designed to ensure a minimum standard of care, or the roots from which a quality program can grow. A tree would not be stable without roots, just as children's services would find it difficult to stand firm in most political 'climates' without baseline legislation.

The trunk of the tree, which supports the canopy, represents the Accreditation process, in that it provides a strong and supportive structure for growth outwards and upwards. Through Accreditation, services can define and consolidate the level of quality they already provide, and plan and consider where they wish to go from that point.

The canopy, or branches and leaves, represents the resulting growth, presenting opportunities for flexibility and individuality in reaching for a standard of excellence, despite differing perspectives.

Trees grow throughout their existence, but never quite reach the sky. Similarly, Accreditation encourages services to strive for 'perfect' quality, but there will always be areas for improvement, especially as we learn more about what represents high quality care and education for young children.

The trick is not to look at Accreditation as a goal to be achieved and then forgotten, but as an event in an ongoing cycle of development and growth. Nor is it just a method for finding out what a service is doing wrong, but a way to affirm the things the service is already doing right.

This book is based on the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS), developed by the National Childcare Accreditation Council of Australia. In the book, reference will be made to the documents which are designed for this system. These include the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System Handbook, Workbook, and Self-Study Report.

Throughout the book will be scattered 'Ideas Banks', which provide practical suggestions to assist services in working through the Self-Study process. The book is divided into sections similar to the steps in the Self-Study/Accreditation process, so each section might be useful at different stages, as the service moves through the process.

Getting started and getting involved

Introducing the concept

Getting started is probably one of the single most difficult tasks in the Accreditation process. You have the materials, you know you'd like to achieve it, but it seems so daunting. The way the concept is introduced to the service team and parents will play a big part in how they perceive the process, their willingness to participate, and the outcome.

Ideas Bank #1 Introducing Accreditation

We are all suspicious of things that we don't understand, so it's important that participants know:

- what Accreditation means;
- what the process will involve;
- what they will be expected to contribute;
- what the outcomes for the service and individual will be;
- what the benefits will be; and
- what additional costs can be expected.

(The group will discover and discuss most of these issues naturally).

This introduction to the Accreditation process should take some time, and occupy a number of discussion sessions. Most of us need time to consider what we have heard, and to think through our responses. Some typical comments and questions raised by staff and parents at this time might be:

'Will this take staff away from the children more often?'

'What will happen if we're not successful?'

'It's scary to be watched and rated in your job.'

'When do we get time to do all this extra work?'

Concerns such as these need to be acknowledged and discussed individually, and openly. Perhaps the group won't have the exact answer, but solutions often evolve through a pooling of ideas. Once all of these issues have been raised, there is a point in the discussion where the decision to continue with the Accreditation process is made.

The National Childcare Accreditation System is linked to Childcare Assistance funding, and not becoming accredited will jeopardise this funding. Not continuing

with the Accreditation process is therefore likely to have a significant impact on both the service and its clients. If the group is considering this alternative, it may be appropriate to discuss the fact that there are options within the Accreditation system to apply for one-, two-, or three-year Accreditation status. Each level requires an increasing standard of quality care, so services feeling nervous about the process may initially choose to apply for one-year status.

As the service moves through the process, it will probably find that it is already achieving at a good or high level in lots of areas. This positive feedback will provide a boost to confidence, and a sense

of progress through the principles. The service may even opt to review the level of Accreditation it is applying for, because of newly found confidence in the quality of care it provides.

Motivation and Publicity

When the decision to continue towards Accreditation is made by the group, staff and parents can be tentative about taking the next step. Motivation, constant discussion, and publication of information and achievements are most important throughout the process, but getting past the initial decision and into action requires some extra effort.

Ideas Bank #2

Motivation/Publicity

- Create (and constantly add to) a list of the things the service already does well.
- Offer documents on Accreditation to any participant to read.
- Provide participants with their own Accreditation folder, or area to keep any materials during the process.
- Publicise details about services which have successfully finished the process.
- Advertise your aim to be the first service in your area to become accredited.
- Make everything throughout the process really visible, e.g. enlarge your timeline chart and display it prominently.
- Discuss with staff and parents where their individual skills, interests, and knowledge could be best utilised in the Self-Study process.
- Most importantly — talk, talk, talk about the process, in service newsletters, at meetings, and at every opportunity!

One of the traps in getting started is waiting 'until things settle down'. Children's services are always changing, and never seem to be the same for two days at a time. Starting the Accreditation process after a certain staff member comes back from leave, or when that new cook or teacher is employed, can seem like a logical idea, until someone else gets a long-term illness, a staff member resigns, and the president of the management committee moves interstate.

Avoid this trap by starting the process, and, if and when times are tough, the group can deal with the situation while continuing with appropriate tasks from the Self-Study process.

Organisation of Committee

Arranging your Accreditation committee can be a motivating activity in itself. Your service will have its own unique culture, and arranging your Accreditation committee will need to address this.

Ideas Bank #3

Setting up committees

- Refer to page 12 of the QIAS Workbook for the minimum requirements for the Accreditation Committee.

Then decide:

- How many staff and parents will participate on the committee?
- When and where will the committee meet?

- How often will it meet?
- Who will organise the meetings?
- How will committee decisions and recommendations be fed back to other staff and parents?

Having the entire staff team as part of the Accreditation committee is one option. One benefit might be that some meetings could be held in conjunction with staff and/or parent meetings. People are then not being asked to give up too many additional evenings or afternoons.

Finding Internal and External Support

The Accreditation process can be draining for all the participants, especially if staff and parents, or the person coordinating the process, are still feeling uncertain. Support, both internal and external, is vital for *all* the participants.

Ideas Bank #4

Support networks

- Are there other children's services in the area which are undertaking the Accreditation process or have successfully completed it?
- Can you form a group to share ideas, pool resources, and offer moral support?
- Would someone from an early childhood training institution or with early childhood expertise be prepared to act as 'mentor' or 'sounding board' for your service, while you work through the process?
- Is there a Lady Gowrie Child Centre near you offering sessions you can attend?
- Can you support the person coordinating the process for your service by offering to complete tasks, either from the process or from day-to-day routines, so that they can take time to spend on Accreditation?

It is vital to begin to develop and expand a network of contacts who are willing to offer support, ideas, resources, and skills, during the Accreditation process. This network might include other child care service staff or parents, Children's Services Advisers, Early Childhood Lecturers from local training institutions, etc. Once developed, these networks can be incredibly useful even after the service has achieved Accreditation, reducing the isolation which has been traditionally felt in children's services in Australia.

Documentation

The entire process of becoming accredited seems especially daunting when you contemplate the documents you need to become familiar with. Each member of the committee, and all staff, need to understand the 52 principles outlined in the *QIAS Handbook*, as well as the various measuring formats in the *Workbook*.

The Accreditation committee members will need to decide how they will share and/or distribute the documents. Individual services will also have different ways of ensuring that participants are familiar with the documents, perhaps by meeting together and discussing each principle in turn, or by having different people read and research each principle and report back to the group.

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Setting up your Time

Frame

The Task and Timeline chart on page 19 of the *Workbook* provides an excellent starting point for planning the service's Accreditation agenda, because it sets out each phase of the process and allows the committee to estimate when each task might have been completed. It will be motivating to see a definite time frame to achieve readiness for the Accreditation review. However, it is easy to over and underestimate the amount of time a particular phase will take to complete, so be ready to allow for some flexibility with the timeline. (This is where allowances are made for that staff member being replaced, or the storeroom shelving collapsing!) Survive whatever the crisis is, and re-set the timeline dates as soon as possible.

Some deadlines will also be beyond planning control, such as those set by the National Childcare Accreditation Council. These deadlines must be considered when deciding how flexible the service can afford to be with the self-study timeline.

Initial Anxieties

As the participants become more aware of what is involved in the Accreditation process, new issues, fears, and concerns can be raised. Comments at this time might include:

'Becoming accredited is too far away, and there are too many obstacles to overcome.'

'Will our service make the grade?'

'What happens when we can't change something the documents say is wrong, or we can't do something we should?'

Such doubts can be a barrier to progress.

As always, open discussion and acceptance of these feelings is the easiest way to resolve them so that progress can resume. Perhaps each person could be asked at this time to add to a two-part list of 'What could be difficult about the process', and 'Why the service must continue toward Accreditation'. It is one of many ways to remind everyone of the big picture, and to move toward group resolution of difficulties.

Involving Parents

Involving parents in the Accreditation process is often a challenge, because parents have busy lives and commitments outside their children's child care service. However, it is also accurate to say that almost all parents are genuinely interested in the quality of care and education their children are receiving from our services. If we want to truly involve parents in our services, especially in the Accreditation process, we need to provide a range of options which will allow parents to select

the activity or level of involvement which is comfortable for them. There is an infinite number of activities which will involve parents, limited only by our imagination.

Remember, however, that it is much more difficult to get parents to attend a formal meeting, and that the service should target activities encouraging parent involvement to the guaranteed access times when parents drop off and pick up their children. Therefore, look for ideas which will enable parents to give a quick response. Avoid activities which require a large amount of time and/or lengthy written responses.



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Ideas Bank #5

Involving parents

- A 'Challenge' board/wall/whiteboard — where a controversial statement, perhaps about one of the Accreditation principles, is commented on by anyone interested, and used in the development of policies/procedures for the service.
- Parent/staff discussion nights.
- Parent communication books/boards.
- Policy reviews displayed for comment.
- Simple, two-minute surveys on a specific topic.

As individuals, we all like to be treated as though our input is important, and it is crucial that the opportunities for parent involvement during the Accreditation process are meaningful, and the resulting feedback must be seen to be utilised by the service in making decisions/recommendations.

Emotional issues and concerns

Assessing the Workload — Reality and Perceptions

No-one would be naive enough to suggest that there is no work involved in becoming accredited, but it is easy to become overwhelmed by the 'perception' of the workload. Fortunately, the procedures outlined in the *QIAS Handbook* are straightforward and simplify organisation. It is important to become familiar with the steps involved in the process, and to have a reasonable working knowledge of the survey and observation formats, the summaries, and centre profile.

However, don't try to cover the entire process in one session, as this will almost definitely lead to an 'overload', which may stall progress for some time.

Dealing with Guilt — Being Away from the Children

Staff and parents can become distressed that the Accreditation process will take staff away from the children, reducing the quantity of interactions. While it is true that staff will need to complete observations, and may be involved in collating data, preparing plans of action, etc., it is also important to remember that the Accreditation process itself is about reflection. This reflection on our practices, attitudes, and actions should make us focus on providing a quality service. While the *quantity* of time with the children may be reduced slightly, the *quality* of interactions will be enhanced throughout the process, and therefore is to be considered time well spent.

Fear of failure

This fear may not be directly expressed, but seems to hover below the surface of initial discussions about Accreditation. It is important to stress that the process should be ongoing, and that not every plan of action or improvement will be complete in time for the review. It is better to work consistently toward an improvement which the service can sustain than to rush about throwing ideas into place which won't survive in the long term.

Remember also that there is the option to select the level of Accreditation for which the service is ready, whether for one, two, or three years. As the group works through the Self-Study process, it will probably find itself reviewing, and in fact increasing, the level initially set for the service. Feedback will identify the many the areas where the service is already achieving at a high-quality level.

There is no way of avoiding the nervous feeling before the review, except to encourage all participants to focus on the areas of strength for the service, and to remind yourselves that there is a clear plan of action for any areas for improvement. It is difficult to keep in perspective, but probably that mis-spelled sign, or the lock that the handyman promised to fix on a cupboard under the kitchen sink, are not, on their own, going to cause the service to be turned down for Accreditation!

What if you don't all agree?

One of the most valuable things about the Accreditation system is the opportunity it provides for the participants to discuss and clarify beliefs. As staff and parents work together through the Accreditation process, different value systems become apparent, and these can create variations in the way individuals interpret the principles.

Discussing what is important to each individual helps to bring the issues into clear focus, and leads to agreements about the way the service as a whole will act, evaluate, and advocate in relation to that issue. In other words, a common philosophy is developed, sometimes out of initial adversity.

Where the adversity looks set to continue in spite of all discussions, external resources such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children book, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children From Birth Through Age 8*, or the Australian Early Childhood Association Code of Ethics and related materials may prove useful, adding support for what research tells us is in the best interests of the children.

The process of discovery, discussion and development which forms the self-study is more important, in many ways, than the result of becoming accredited. All of the intangible benefits will generally have happened prior to the review, and should continue after the decision is known. There is a saying that a cart and horse together is more than just a cart and a horse, because together they form a transport vehicle. The Accreditation process is the same, because

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the results of all the discussions, recommendations, and Plans of Action will be far more valuable than the input of any single individual. Similarly, the quality of service provided to clients will be better than just the sum of the improvements made.

Must it all be 'according to the book'?

Participants, in their need to 'pin down' the measurement of quality, will sometimes interpret the principles in the most literal fashion. For example, if the Accreditation materials mention wheeled toys, then the service must have them, or fail. It's easy to forget that the QIAS system allows for individual differences between services. Each of the descriptions accompanying the principles is a guide, not an exhaustive list. Some services may elect not to have wheeled toys for a particular reason, but have negotiated this choice with parents, and provide other activities which will compensate. Where this sort of situation occurs, why not document the process of making the decision and submit it with the Self-Study Report?



Areas for improvement and plans of action

Identifying where improvements are possible

As information is collated from the Parent Questionnaire and Staff Observations, patterns of responses will begin to show areas of good quality as well as areas where there is room for improvement. The areas where the service is already achieving good things will be identified, and these should be publicised and recorded as a 'pat on the back' for everyone. It is very motivating to feel that there are areas that the service does not need to work on, which can be mentally 'ticked off'.

By going back to the *Handbook*, and the description of individual principles, the committee can begin to identify what the service may need to do to improve its rating on other principles. These areas become the 'Issues' to be entered onto the Plan of Action, shown on pages 36-38 of the *Workbook*.

Brainstorming solutions

Sometimes the solution to the area for improvement appears patently obvious, like getting a handyman to put a lock on the cupboard that holds the dishwashing chemicals! Other times the answer is less clear, or there may be a number of options. This is when brainstorming can be really useful. It gives everyone an opportunity to

offer a suggestion, even if it is humorous or appears outlandish.

One really effective method for brainstorming involves asking everyone to write down the three things they feel would solve the problem at hand, on separate pieces of paper. These pieces of paper are then attached to one large display board, and the participants group similar suggestions together.

Some discussion may be useful to clarify the meaning of the suggestions, but it should not begin to address the usefulness or otherwise of the solution. Once the like comments are grouped together, each participant can be given three different coloured stickers, which have been supplied with separate values, (e.g. blue is worth 6, green 3, and yellow 1).

Each participant then places their stickers against the suggestion or group of like suggestions which they feel have the most potential as solutions to the problem. Note: If they wish, participants can place all three stickers against the one suggestion, or against two or three separate ideas. The total values of stickers placed against each suggestion is then calculated, and the idea or ideas with the most support are the ones that participants continue to develop as 'Strategies' in the Plan of Action.

Developing a Plan of

Action (page 37, Workbook)

Once the committee has identified the Issues and Strategies for the Plan of Action, it will be necessary to break the strategies down into specific tasks which will lead toward resolving each issue.

These tasks may involve jobs such as preparing or revising documentation, e.g. policies; arranging some additional training for staff; communicating with parents to clarify some aspect of the program; or perhaps purchasing new materials or equipment.

Once again, in order to get past the decision to follow a particular strategy, and onto action, it is really helpful to complete the second page of the Plan of Action.

The steps involved in doing this will include: identifying individual tasks, detailing *who* is going to be responsible for that task, exactly *what* they are going to do, and *when* the task will be completed. It is also useful to complete the column identifying what resources and/or training will be needed for each task to be completed, as these may involve budget allocations.

Following through

Now there is a Plan of Action which will help the service to achieve the Accreditation result the committee has aimed for. How does it make sure that the plan is implemented? Effective time management plays a crucial part in all aspects of the Self-Study process, but perhaps this is the most critical time of all, because it is so easy for the process to stall after the initial gush of paperwork. Someone needs to be responsible for ensuring that each issue is moving toward resolution, and that the assigned tasks are being completed as close to the target date as possible. Delegation of individual issues to various participants may well be a sanity-saver for the coordinator of the Self-Study process! These people should still report back regularly to the larger committee about progress, so that they can get support and additional assistance if necessary.

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Sending in the Self-Study Report

Writing up the documents

Writing up the Self-Study Report involves the final collation of data about the service, and follows the second round of service evaluation through Staff Observations, Parent Questionnaires, etc., once the Plan of Action has been implemented. The person preparing the final documents should have at least one other person check thoroughly once the data is entered, so that transcription errors are minimised. (There is nothing worse than having to re-submit information on or before the review day!)



Getting the documentation together

Imagine for a moment what the reviewer will feel like when they come into the service to validate the standards recorded in the Self-Study Report. They are entering a service they have probably never had contact with before, and have only a short time to consider a very large number of issues, as well as interacting with staff, parents and the director/coordinator. More than likely they will feel some degree of nervousness, just as staff and parents in the service do.

Imagine then how relieved the reviewer will feel if the service is well-prepared for the visit, and has the necessary documents organised and readily accessible.

Ideas Bank #6

Preparing the documents

- Have at least one trial run at the Self-Study Report on a copy, before completing the original.
- As you complete the report, gather any materials in a single folder or area at the centre e.g. philosophy, copies of staff qualifications, inservice records, policy and procedure manuals, programming and menu samples, staff and parent orientation packages, immunisation records, newsletters). Keep these materials in the same order as the principles.
- There is no overall list of the documents the reviewer will need to sight. A partial list is on page 34 of the Self-Study Report, and other items can be identified from the *Workbook*.
- If the materials are not suitable to be held as described above — for example, because of confidentiality — then insert a clear statement as to the exact location of the documents, or who can offer the information required.

Arranging a review date, reviewer

Once the service submits the Self-Study Report, it will be notified of a number of potential reviewer's names. The service will have the option to veto two of the reviewers. Once the reviewer is selected, a mutually suitable date or dates for the review will be arranged.



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Ideas Bank #7

Planning your review date

Consider:

- Will the majority of permanent staff be available on that date?
- Are there any external factors which would make the date unsuitable, such as the contractor finally being available to commence the playground redevelopment?
- Will there be time for a pre-briefing with all participants just before this date, to discuss what the review day(s) might be like?

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The Review

Planning the day(s)

One of the simplest ways of preparing for the review is to let all the participants know when it is happening! Parents are usually only too happy to schedule conferences with staff around the review, and may offer assistance in a number of other ways.

Arrange a pre-briefing close to the review, to give the participants a chance to discuss the proposed timetable for the review itself, as well as any final issues. Staff are likely to want some idea of what the reviewer will talk to them about. The reviewer will probably discuss the service and its operations, but it is unlikely to take the form of an inquisition. Encourage the

staff to relax as much as possible and answer questions from their own knowledge, using common sense.

Remember, it is not a test to ensure everyone knows the complete contents of every document in the service by heart. Staff should know that the documents exist and where to look for them if necessary.

In terms of organisation, ensure that there are no unnecessary, pre-planned meetings to be held during the review period. Try to avoid having too many students or other 'extras' who require large amounts of your input, but by all means encourage that fantastic volunteer or parent who knows the service's routines and program inside-out.

The director or coordinator can expect to spend rather long days at the service just prior to and during the review. Time management and delegation skills used effectively at this time will ensure that day-to-day operations continue as normally as possible. Plan ahead to ensure that everyday tasks such as ordering, roster preparation, paint and play-dough making, etc., are done before the first day of the review if possible. With the best organisation in the world, it is possible that something out of the blue will happen, such as one of the play areas needing an urgent repair, a staff member becoming ill the day before review starts, or it raining so heavily that the car park floods!

These might sound like the end of the world, but remember that the reviewer will be familiar with children's services, and has probably had similar experiences. Arrange repairs, relief staff, or whatever you can, explain the situation to the reviewer, take many deep breaths, then continue with the review.

Dealing with the nerves

Everyone will naturally feel nervous during the review, and a reassuring comment from the director to each individual, whenever the opportunity presents, may help reduce this anxiety. It is important that staff maintain normal routines, including taking allocated breaks, during the review, so that the reviewer sees an accurate sample of your program, and also because it provides a familiar base for everyone to hang on to if necessary. There is much mutual support which can be offered between staff over a cup of tea or coffee!

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Debriefing the participants

At the end of the review, there are so many questions that participants will want to ask that it is important to plan time to debrief. Some of these questions will be along the lines of 'Do you think we will have done enough?' and 'What did the reviewer say to you?' These questions are very natural and need to be discussed openly, while still fresh. Other questions will be focused on items where the reviewer's rating was different from the one on the Self-Study Report. It is important to share with all participants the discussions held over these items, and to reinforce that the service was able to respond in writing to explain the variation in the rating if necessary.

An informal social gathering is another valuable idea, and might be planned in addition to the formal debriefing — for example, arranging to meet at the local cafe at a certain time after the reviewer leaves.

Dealing with the 'We should have done...'

One of the negative after-effects of the review can be a tendency to constantly relive the review itself, and to focus on what the team should have said or done on the day. Naturally, we will think of better ways to say something, or do things after the event, when we've had time to think! At this point it is better to try to get staff and parents focused on where the service is headed next, or at least to encourage them to also spend some time on the things they know they explained or did well during review.



When it's over

The review is over, the debriefing is done, and everyone suddenly looks at one another and says 'What do we do now?' In short, you WAIT!

The feeling of anti-climax

There can be a strong feeling of anti-climax in the service. The event that the team has worked toward for some time seems to have come and gone in a flash.

The motivation levels suddenly slump, and it might be tempting to relax completely and return to standards held prior to commencing the self-study. It's a trap! Part of the debriefing should include a

short session reminding everyone that the QIAS is an ongoing process, aimed at providing continuing high quality care and education for children. The review itself is an event in the process, not the end of it! Another suggestion which might help the service to avoid the post-review blues is an 'End of Review — Onward and Upward Celebration'.

Maintaining the Standard

Now the service has achieved standards which push it closer to your newly-expanded philosophy about quality child care, the Accreditation committee can decide how it will monitor those standards.



Ideas Bank #8

Maintaining the standard

- Set up a quality calendar of all the activities planned to ensure the service maintains a high standard for the next 12 months, including activities such as:
 - repeating the Parent Questionnaire at least annually to measure satisfaction with the service;
 - Completing Staff Observations to review ratings and compare them with the standard set at the time of review;
- displaying policies due for renewal and requesting input from staff and parents;
- reviewing and evaluating service progress on the Plan of Action; and
- challenging yourselves to think of new and interesting activities to involve other parents in the service.

Planning the next step

Once the Accreditation committee has become familiar with using a Plan of Action, it will probably find many different ways to use this or a similar format in the service. It can be used for strategic or long-term planning, for conflict resolution, and even for arranging a parent/staff interaction calendar or a staff social outing. The best thing is that it is a fairly simple tool to keep the service moving toward better quality care, and improved service delivery.

It is also possible that there are still some tasks outstanding from the Plan of Action submitted with the Self-Study Report. These can be reviewed and the tasks, target dates, etc., rewritten if necessary, so that the momentum created before the review is maintained.

Staff and parents may feel so empowered by the process that they decide to work toward a goal that had previously seemed out of reach. One centre, after successfully achieving Voluntary Accreditation under the Pilot AECA scheme in NSW, had the courage to attempt the re-development of its entire outdoor learning environment. With time, planning and patience, it succeeded.

The decision

Celebrations and public relations

When the wait is over and the decision comes back from the National Childcare Accreditation Council, what will the service do? There are probably plans for a celebration of some sort which will involve all the participants, but what about taking the opportunity to publicise the service's achievement more widely? Child care is a newsworthy event in today's political environment, so why not give yourselves, and the Early Childhood profession, a well-deserved pat on the back?



Ideas Bank #9 Publicity

- Have a media release ready to send to the local newspapers and television networks — usually one A4 page with a catchy headline is most effective. Point out anything unique about your achievement, such as being the first service of your type in the area, or that the service caters for special needs children, or that you achieved your result 'against the odds' for some reason.
- Invite local dignitaries, politicians, other services, child care training institutions, or the general community to share in the celebrations in some way.
- Enlarge the service's entry in the phone book to tell potential clients that the service has been accredited.
- Hold an Open Day to show off the service.

Disappointment and

Determination

It's not something you want to think about, but not all services will become accredited on their first or perhaps second attempt. While the committee probably won't think a news release to the local media is appropriate in this situation, it is vital that the result is shared with at least the participants from the service. Some

thought before making the announcement will be necessary, including how to honestly present the areas for improvement which have been identified. Any Plan of Action already developed which addresses these issues can be presented and evaluated, or ask the participants to help start on a new plan right then and there. The object is to move quickly past the disappointment, without ignoring it, and re-kindle determination and motivation. Make it a challenge, if that is appropriate.



Problem areas

Many services strike similar areas where there is room for improvement. This is one of the reasons that support groups of participants from different services going through the Self-Study Process can be so valuable. Below are a few of the common problem areas, with solutions which have proved useful.

Nutrition, Health and

Safety practices —

Principle 39, 41, 42, and 46

Nutrition, Health and Safety Practices in general have been identified as one of the most common problem areas for services undergoing the Self-Study Process. More specifically, examples include washing hands; ensuring that all chemicals are stored safely away from children; storage of soiled nappies; maintaining effective supervision outdoors; and keeping those power point protectors in their place.

The Plan of Action for the first two of these issues might look something like the one shown here.

ISSUE	STRATEGY	TASKS
Handwashing in the outdoor area after wiping noses is difficult because there is no running water facility appropriate for this use. Going inside would reduce numbers of staff supervising outside.	Locate and purchase product which can be used in this sort of environment and arrange staff training for its proper use.	Purchase handwashing solution, e.g. Hibicol. Rearrange shelf in outdoor area to hold tissues, garbage bucket, and portable first aid kit. Arrange clinical nurse consultant from local hospital to discuss correct use of Hibicol and reinforce importance of handwashing.
Chemicals for the dishwasher are stored in an open-fronted cupboard near the kitchen door.	Arrange for a locking cupboard door to be installed on this cupboard.	Contact maintenance staff and arrange for the locking door to be installed immediately.

TASK	PERSON RESP.	ACTION	TARGET DATE	TRAINING/ RESOURCES
Purchase Hibicol	Joan	Locate distributor, price, and arrange purchase.	22nd Aug., 1994	Hibicol Handrub
Rearrange shelf area	Sean	Rearrange shelf outside to hold tissues, Hibicol, garbage bucket, and portable first aid kit.	10th Aug., 1994	nil
Arrange training	Ashlea	Contact local hospital clinical nurse consultant to train staff in correct use of Hibicol & importance of handwashing.	15th Oct., 1994	Training in correct use Hibicol & importance of handwashing
Arrange installation of locking door	Ayisha	Contact handyman for centre and arrange immediate installation of locking door on front of cupboard holding dishwasher chemicals.	1st Aug., 1994	Cupboard door, hinges and locking mechanism

Consistent Caregivers for

Infants — Principle I

The description of Good Quality Care for infants, within Principle One, includes a statement that 'Staffing arrangements (should) make it possible for each child to receive consistent care from only one or two staff members.' In some centres, sheer size, staff shift rosters, and hours of opening can make meeting this criteria seem difficult.

A solution or compromise might be possible, perhaps by having one staff member work on a consistent shift with most responsibility for caring for the infants. Any solutions/compromises reached, such as the one mentioned, should be discussed with and supported by parents and staff together. This discussion and the perceived benefits of the solution should be recorded and included with the Self-Study Report and shown during the review.

Ride-on toys — Principle 20

A number of services have been concerned over the descriptions in Principle 20 which recommend the use of ride-on toys for toddlers and preschoolers at the Basic Standard. One service in particular was concerned because it has a split level outdoor learning environment with a sloped embankment between the levels. There is a large concrete triangular verandah; however the access from the indoor play areas cuts directly across the verandah, and infants and toddlers would be at risk if ride-on toys were used in this area.



The issue was discussed at length with the Accreditation and Management committees, resulting in a survey of all parents and staff at the service. Each respondent was asked their opinion of the use of ride-on toys in the outdoor area; whether the children were having any experiences with this form of gross motor activity at home or elsewhere; and what sort of substitute or compromise they would recommend if ride-on toys were not to be used. The overwhelming response was that the children mainly had ride-on toys at home, and that parents and staff would prefer that the service used more wheeled toys such as prams, trolleys, and trailers. Staff agreed to research and introduce other activities to enhance gross motor development in the muscle groups utilised during play on ride-on toys. Once again, the discussion, survey results, and Plan of Action were clearly documented and included with the Self Study Report.

The areas for improvement in your service may not be identical with those discussed above, but the concepts involved in addressing them will be the same, whatever the problem.

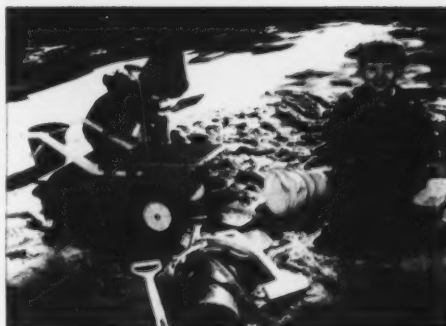
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Handy hints

Using external resources

Do look for outside help! Some of the principles and the descriptions may involve solutions which are outside the expertise of our multi-talented Accreditation committees! The *Workbook* provides a listing of organisations you can call on for help on pages 8 and 9, but there is nothing to stop the committee extending this professional network to include:



Ideas Bank #10

Local help organisations

- The local Public Health Unit holds information on infectious diseases and other illnesses and exclusion periods, immunisation information, infection control procedures, etc.
- A hospital or community health centre (especially the infection control consultant; or child, adolescent and family health unit) might also be able to help with some of the information above.
- Local services for children with special needs may be able to provide outreach support or advice for staff to help integrate these children into the service.
- Ethnic communities councils or Aboriginal support groups can advise about the issues and needs of their cultural group, or help you to enhance the multicultural perspective in your program.

Networking with other children's services

It's worth mentioning again! A worry shared is a worry halved, as the old saying goes. Why spend valuable time trying to find a solution to a problem that a centre just down the way has already resolved? Usually, you can all agree to share ideas and support one another through these issues. It will also mean that, where a number of services have a similar problem, the brainstorming will extend to many more staff and parents, and the workload in following up a potential solution can be shared. External organisations such as the ones mentioned earlier will not be bombarded with as many enquiries about the same issue, but can be approached by a single representative for a group of services.

Utilising parent skills and resources

We often ask parents to identify their occupation on enrolment forms, but has the service ever asked the parent who works at the plant nursery if he/she could recommend a shade tree without berries, nuts, or pods to cause concern? Could the nurse working in the dental clinic provide some posters or information about dental hygiene, or perhaps talk to the children and/or other parents?

Having a facilitator

Having someone to coordinate the Self-Study Process, and monitor whether the service is keeping roughly to the timeline, is almost essential. This person could be any one of a number of people, from the director to one of the parents or a staff member. Often it is helpful to have someone who has less emotional involvement in the service to keep an eye on progress through the Self-Study Process.

The role of the facilitator is to gently remind busy participants of the service's goal to become accredited, and to motivate individual team members to complete the tasks they have accepted. The facilitator's only task may be to ensure that progress continues, or other roles may arise, depending on who the facilitator is and what time can be contributed.

Backing up the facilitator's position, someone is needed to ensure that secretarial tasks (such as copying Staff Observation Forms and Parent Questionnaires; distribution of notices of meetings, minutes, and timeline dates) are completed.

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The best parts, or what gets you through

Unity of Purpose

Without a doubt, one of the best parts of the Accreditation process is the feeling of a shared purpose and goal which builds up while working through the self-study. Parents begin to initiate conversations more frequently with staff, maybe because Accreditation gives them more information about what is being done, and therefore there is more common ground to share. As well, staff show increased support for one another in both the professional and personal arenas.

The morale of the service seems to improve as everyone works toward the completion of specific tasks using a strategy agreed on with group consensus.

Issues that have hovered as concerns around the back of people's minds are finally given voice and acted upon — and individuals then feel that their ideas are valued. Self-esteem is boosted. Good morale follows.

Losing the 'Mystique'

Gradually, all the participants become familiar with the concept and reality of the QIAS, and with each of the principles. The 'jargon' becomes a normal part of everyone's vocabulary, and often a kind of shorthand language is developed to describe the process and principles. Suddenly, when someone says '23', everyone knows they are referring to a principle, and probably they also know that it is something to do with sleep and dressing routines.

This language, and the common understanding of the big picture, shared by all the participants may form part of the reason that there is a sense of teamwork associated with the Accreditation process. Working towards practical solutions to achieve the 52 principles divests them of their mystique, and broadens understanding of the underlying concepts of 'quality' care.

Dawning recognition that we already do a great job

Once the participants understand the Self-Study Process, and begin to focus on the principles, there is almost a sense of wonder at the number of areas where the service is achieving either good or high quality standards. This sense of realisation should be reinforced whenever possible, and especially when there are tough decisions to be made about the areas identified for improvement.

Keeping some sort of a coloured tally of the centre's current rating for each standard might be one way to reinforce attention on the positive, as well as encouraging participants to work toward improving in areas with lower ratings.

Seeing it happen around you

There is an undeniable sense of satisfaction in fixing a problem, especially when the group can see that the solution is merely a series of manageable steps. Enjoying and being motivated to continue by this feeling of achievement can often be pre-planned when designing the Plan of Action. Arrange the tasks to ensure that the service achieves success quickly with simpler tasks, and then regularly as the more complex tasks begin to come together.

Learning to laugh when things seem grim

One of the many good things that happen during the Self-Study Process, is an ability and willingness to see the humorous side of situations which might otherwise have had everyone tearing out their hair.

On the day before review, when both the dishwasher and hot water system pack it in, we can suddenly create images of a Mickey-Mouse-in-Fantasia-like procession bringing water from the local swimming pool! While we roll around the floor with laughter (slightly hysterically!), someone manages to ring an emergency plumber and the appropriate repair company and explain our crisis. All right, so the dishwasher isn't fixed until halfway through the review, but paper plates with Mickey Mouse on them are arranged as a joke, and the day is saved. And we'll still be laughing about it for years!

Conclusion

So, there it is... the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System. Frightening to contemplate beforehand, challenging to prepare for and begin, reassuring and uplifting to work through, and exciting and nerve-wracking during the review event and the wait for the decision.

And that's where the cycle begins again, creating a momentum, continually lifting each service towards its fullest potential in terms of quality. Take it on! Make it happen for your service! Feed the branches, twigs, and leaves of your service 'tree' and send it reaching for the sky!

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